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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the opportunities available to women to advance educationally and professionally in Italy. Data from official Italian publications are used to compare the enrollment of males and females in secondary, higher secondary, and university education, and to assess the availability for women of positions at the university level. The first part describes Italy's government-directed educational system, which begins with a private or state nursery school (scuole materne); a five-year, two-phase elementary school; and a three-year lower secondary school, entered by examination and leading to a lower secondary certificate at age 14. Students who choose to go on after obtaining this certificate are tracked into either training institutes or classical, scientific, or artistic Lycees that prepare students for higher education. Recent trends show that a growing percentage of Italian females are deciding to pursue higher education, technical training, or teacher training. Nevertheless, the disparity between opportunities for men and women at the university level is very acute. (TE)

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN EDUCATION: PROMISE AND REALITY IN ITALIAN EDUCATION

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ASSESSING HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN EDUCATION

This study will examine data to evaluate the opportunities available to women to advance educationally and professionally in Italy. We will examine data as they apply to the education of women in Italy, and will evaluate how the educational system has responded to the educational human rights needs of Italian women. The use of data, including official Italian publications, is presented to compare the enrollment of males and of females in secondary, higher secondary, and university education. The availability of positions at the university level is also an area of examination.

Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states:

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. (United Nations)

Moreover, "Knowledge is not all that a culture requires" (Faure et al., 1972, p. 38). It also requires the transmission of that knowledge and the educational system has that function. In fact, one of its essential functions is that of transmitting to each generation the knowledge that the previous generation inherited from its forbearers.

"Education in Italy is a national affair. There are many aspects of Italian education that cannot be altered by anything other than an act of Parliament" (Beauchamp & Beauchamp, 1972, p.

57). "For the first time in history, education is now engaged in preparing men for a type of society which does not yet exist" (Faure et al., 1972, p. 2). The Italian educational system can reflect this view in its awareness of educating its population, which includes a larger number of women than men. Since 1960, the female population of Italy has comprised over 51% of the total population (Holmes, 1979). For example, in 1971, the total Italian population was over 53 million, of which over 27 million were females (UNESCO, 1983).

The official body of the country that is responsible for implementing policies and forming philosophies that respond to human rights needs is the government. The government official responsible for the Italian educational system is the Minister of Education, who is assisted by 13 director-generals (Beauchamp & Beauchamp, 1972). It is of interest to note, that of all the ministers in the government, only the Minister of Labor is a woman. Whenever new curriculum is to be established for a new school, it must be legislated by an act of Parliament, and the individual who is specifically charged with curriculum is the Minister of Public Instruction.

The Italian school system may begin with a private or state nursery school (scuole materne) which is not compulsory but free and state supported, where available. "Education is compulsory and free between the ages of six and fourteen" (The Europa Yearbook: A World Survey, 1978, p. 800). The elementary school (scuole elementare) is organized into two cycles: Classes one and two, and classes three, four, and five. The majority of

students attend public schools, while 7% attend private schools. A successful examination at the end of the five-year cycle permits entry into the lower secondary school. The lower secondary school (scuole medie unificate) is a three-year school leading to a lower secondary certificate. Receipt of this certificate, at age 14, marks the end of the educational requirements. Figures indicate that at the elementary level Italy is educating 100% of its eligible males and females, ages six to ten, since 1970 (UNESCO, 1971).

In the present Italian educational system, students at 14 years of age make an important decision which affects their educational careers, such as to leave school, to continue, to marry, or to go to work. As an example of the choices females were making in 1972, Giancola's (1975) data indicate that from 100 females surveyed (ages 14 to 19), those who were students numbered 52; workers were 22; housewives numbered 21; and 5 joined other fields. Very young persons are making choices which will affect the quality of their lives. It appears that a very high percentage of Italian females are deciding to pursue their education. This trend has continued to improve. In 1960, 40% of the females enrolled in the secondary level school beginning at age 14. By 1968, 47% of Italian females were attending secondary level schools (Holmes 1979).

There is presently a campaign geared to bring educational reform, which in part, would raise the compulsory school age to 15. Because education is legally tied to politics through Parliamentary procedure, change has been frustrating for many

educators (Merritt, 1981). Because of the compulsory school age, Italy has been successful in achieving a literacy rate of 95%, and ranking 40th among 178 countries (Kurian, 1979). Literacy is a measurable indicator of a country's commitment to education and it seems that Italy has achieved measurable success in this area; however, there is a need to point out that the illiteracy rate among Italian women is consistently higher than that of the men--7.4% to 4%, respectively (ISTAT, 1984).

After successfully passing an examination at the lower secondary level school, students are encouraged to enter one of several types of institutions in the upper secondary level school (scuole secondarie superiore), those being classical, artistic, and scientific lycees, training schools for elementary education teachers (magistrali) and technical and vocational institutes. It is at this point that decisions are made that will lead students to higher education and is a critical time.

The Lycees are schools which prepare students for higher education. It follows that the greater number of females who are guided into enrolling in lycees, the greater number would receive a higher secondary school certificate (maturita). This certificate allows access to the universities. At this secondary level (ages 11 to 18), the school enrollment ratio in 1970 for females was 55% and 66% for males (UNESCO, 1971). The Italian educational system was not educating 45% of those females who were eligible. By 1980, the enrollment ratio for females attending secondary schools had risen to 71% and 75% for males. This increase of females in education could be partly attributed

to an awareness that was brought on by an autonomous women's movement during the 1970s. Women in Italy made measurable gains in all areas that affected the quality of their lives and the educational establishment also became more available to them.

Merritt (1981) stated:

> Those destined to assume the top leadership posts in politics, business, science and the arts--and such persons were by and large the children of those who already held such posts--were directed to the classical, scientific and artistic lycees which permitted access to university education. (p. 320)

A comparison of the enrollment figures from the school year 1948-49 to the year 1972-73 indicates a significant increase in enrollment of females in the lycees:

Enrollment Comparison by Percentage

Type of Lycee	1948-49	1972-73
Classical	39.4%	53.6%
Scientific	20.4%	39.3%
Artistic	25.0%	59.1%

From Italy Documents and Notes: A Two-Monthly Review, July-August 1975 (p. 54) by R. Giancola (Ed.), 1975. Rome: Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

After successful completion of five years in a lycee, students are allowed access to the universities. While women were gaining rights in other areas affecting the quality of their lives, they were also choosing to improve their educational opportunities. Several factors contributed to the increase in their enrollment. There appeared to occur (1) universal awareness of the importance

of education, (2) certain awareness by women to become economically independent, and (3) the instituting of a school attendance age of 14 (Giancola, 1975).

Another type of institute to which students are tracked is the technical institute. Merritt (1981) stated:

> Technical institutes and normal schools aimed at preparing intermediate elites. The former provided the technicians and administrators for production and distribution systems in agriculture, industry and commerce; the latter selected and socialized those who would teach in the elementary schools, critical level for instilling in children the values that maintain the existing structures of society and determining who advances to the secondary schools. (p. 320)

Figures here also point to an increase in the enrollment of women from 18.1% in 1948 to 26.7% in 1972-73 (Giancola, 1975). Post-war activity toward the improvement of the quality of life for women seems to also include an increase in educational enrollment.

There is, however, another type of institute which was, and still is, predominately female, and that is the teacher training institute or magistrali. The five-year upper secondary school trains teachers of pre-primary and primary students. A diploma is earned upon completion enabling students to teach or to enter higher education in a university. Of the entire female enrollment at the secondary level, 23.5% were enrolled in teacher institutes during 1972-73. This fact is further supported by the statistics that of all students enrolled in teacher institutes nationally, 89.1% were female, and the trend has continued. In 1981-82, Italy conferred certificates on over 46,000 students who were able to teach at the lower elementary level. Of these

graduates, almost 43,000 were female (ISTAT, 1984). This statistical evidence suggests that females are being encouraged to follow an occupation in teaching. Although the teaching profession is held in high esteem, there is a certain status attached to the different levels of teachers.

> People still often think that a teacher's rank and status is measured by the age and mental level of his students. The school-master giving 18-year-old youths a classical education enjoys greater respect than his colleague teaching 15-year-old boys in a technical college. There is certainly more prestige attached to teaching mathematics than to teaching toddlers to read and write. Cock of the roost, of course, is the university professor. (Faure et al., 1972, p. 58)

At the university level, professors are on either an annual contract (incaricati) or they are on permanent status (ruolo). To be on permanent appointment as a university professor is to reach the pinnacle of educational success. In 1971-72, the female professors represented 10.3% of the members of the profession on annual contracts and 1.8% of the permanent appointments (Alfrieri & Ambrosini, 1975).

Italian males are typically enrolled in the classical, artistic, and technical institutes which allow access to university studies.

University education in Italy can be state supported or privately financed. Degree courses range from four to six years again leading to diplomas. "In every country, those who have attended or completed post secondary studies constitute the elite of the population" (Kurian, 1979, p. 321). Consistently, more males have graduated from the Italian universities.

The percentage of a country's population that has reached the highest level of educational attainment is, therefore, an important indicator of the country's intellectual resources. For example, in 1975, the United States led the world with 21% of the total population having a graduate degree of postsecondary training. Italy's post-secondary degree holders was 2.6% in that year. The midpoint (median) for the countries surveyed was 1.7%

Traditionally, female enrollment has lagged at all levels of education, but particularly in higher education. Furthermore, according to Kurian (1979):

> . . . an enrollment ratio of less than 25% indicates that the doors of educational achievement are open only partially, at best, to women and may even argue that there is widespread discrimination and prejudice against women in public life. (p. 324)

Italy's enrollment ratio at the university level for women was 39% and ranked, in 1976, 38th among 133 countries (Kurian, 1979). In comparison the enrollment ratios for Western Europe and worldwide were 38% and 40%, respectively. The fact is that there are 61% of Italian females of university age not being educated; but the doors of educational achievement are open to those women wishing to attend. The ratio, however, is comparable to that of other countries in Western Europe.

The attainment of a degree, for many Italian women, constitutes the end of the educational cycle. Giancola (1975) presents an interesting statistic: From 100 women between the ages of 25 and 29 who are eligible for post-secondary study, 2 continue their studies, 33 work, 1 is unemployed, 63 are housewives, and 1 re-enters education in a different area.

There is another point which needs to be made. The percentage of women graduates from universities has been increasing since 1950. At that time it was 30.6%, compared to 42.5%, in 1970 (Giancola, 1975). However, in areas of study other than teaching, there appears to be an imbalance of females to males gaining educational opportunities. In 1970-71, in the field of medicine, there were 18.1% female graduates; in engineering, .8% of the graduates were females. These are fields seemingly dominated by men.

In 1973, women professors of Law and Political Science, on annual contracts was 4%. At the permanent appointment level, women's contracts dropped to 1.8%. A similar pattern occurred in other faculty appointments. Occhionero (1970) further contends that this system filters the sexes, progressively decreasing the female element until it is reduced to a very small representation at the top of the university pyramid.

If the purpose of Italian education, understood as the formation of the human personality in its fundamental dimension, is "to imply adapting to a scientific frame of mind" (Longo, 1982, p. 91), then it can be concluded that Italy must direct its reforms toward encouraging, recruiting, and rewarding as many of its citizens as it possibly can--a large and important part of this population being the women of Italy.

To totally extend this reform toward education, Italy must also realize its responsibility to its different regions. Southern Italy is much more agricultural and agrarian.

> In this process, agricultural workers, living at or below the minimum level, are among the least favoured classes--requiring urgent political, social and educational action. (Longo, 1982, p. 89)

As a response to the problem of "integrating Southern Italy with the more industrially developed North" (The Europa Yearbook, 1978), the government's set of a "Cassa per il Mezzogiorno [Investment for the South] in 1950 to increase investment in the South" (p. 867). Southern Italians have resisted change and the plan has not found much success.

Italy has also recognized that a problem exists at the upper secondary school level, one of which was "reducing social biases in access to upper secondary education" (Merritt, 1981, p. 372). In 1970, "the prospects for change have been keyed to the creation of a comprehensive education system" (p. 374). The main ideas "were prescribed by a commission under the presidency of the republic deputy Biasini" (Holmes, 1983, p. 4510. Parliamentary squabbling produced no solution.

> Towards the end of 1976 the Minister of Public Instruction, Malfatti, issued his plan for reform. . . . In general, most people welcomed the overall objective of bringing all the educational institutions into one general system. (pp. 451-452)

The plans are still under discussion since "political parties are deadlocked on the issue" (Merritt, 1981, p. 381).

> Governments have come and gone, but none has been able to build the coalition needed to move beyond the negotiating stage on the Education Committee's proposal. (p. 383).

Italy regards education as among one of its priorities, as indicated by several observations. There has been an increase in educational spending. In 1960, Italy spent 3.6% of its Gross

National Product (GNP) on education; in 1974, Italy spent 5% of its GNP on education while ranking 44th among 109 countries (Kurian, 1979); in 1978, 5.1% of its GNP went to education (Holmes, 1983). The midpoint percentage of the countries surveyed was 4.4%.

Italy has established an Educational Committee to make reforms in its educational system, as was mentioned earlier. Statistics indicate an increase in enrollment at the upper secondary level for both males and females. Recognizing its responsibility to perform services not only to its own citizens but also to the culture around it, the government of Italy was one of the nations of the Council of Europe in 1949 which established the European Commission of Human Rights. Its aim was the implementation and legal protection of civil rights of all citizens of member states (The Europa Yearbook, 1978). Italy's Constitution specifically guarantees education in Articles 29-34, which state:

> Education is available to all and is free and obligatory for at least eight years. Higher education for students of proven merit shall be aided by scholarships and other allowances made by the Republic. (Constitution of the Republic of Italy, 1948)

The Constitution also recognizes women in Articles 35-37 which state: "Women shall have the same rights, and for equal work, the same remuneration as men" (p. 880). Through the compulsory school age of 14, it appears that Italy is providing education to the women of Italy. At the elementary level, Italy has followed the directive of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It appears that in the upper secondary school, the differentiation begins, and the disparity between opportunities for men and women is very acute at the university level. Advancement to professor appointments, and thereby to positions of responsibility, prestige, and decision making, is inaccessibly low to women. Italy needs to point toward a development when the upper secondary system will truly comprise schools for the masses.

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